

## Executive Summary

Capacity Development for Research: Strategic Evaluation

# Developing Organizational Capacity in Cambodia:

## *Organizational Case Study of the Ministry of Environment*

by Cor Veer

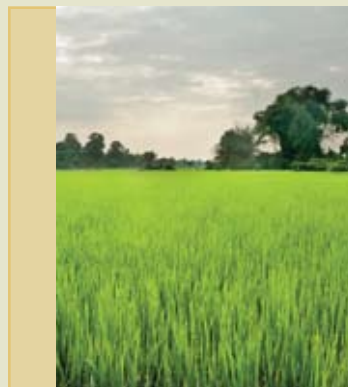
### Background

IDRC's Evaluation Unit (EU) is conducting a multi-phase strategic evaluation to investigate the Centre's contributions to the development of capacities of those with whom the Centre works. The evaluation aims to provide IDRC's own staff and managers with an intellectual framework and a useful common language to help harness the concept of capacity development and document the experiences and results the Centre has accumulated in this domain. Specifically, it focuses on the processes and results of IDRC support for the development of capacities of its southern partners: what capacities have been enhanced? Whose? How? How effectively?

Phase 4 of the strategic evaluation focuses on the elaboration of six organizational case studies intended to help the Centre better understand how it can best plan for, implement, and evaluate support for its partners' capacity development.

### Research for Development Context

Cambodia's emergence from two decades of civil war opened a new era marked by fresh opportunities—but also profound challenges. After the UN-supported elections of 1993 the country's economy grew considerably, poverty began to drop, and some positive outcomes were reported in health and education. There were indications, however, that short term economic growth was being achieved at



*Cambodian rice paddy*

the expense of the natural environment—a trade-off that would ultimately damage the sustainability of the country's natural resource-based economy. Since 80 per cent of Cambodia's 14 million citizens are rural people dependent upon agriculture, moves

to ensure sustainability of the resource base would be essential to ensuring their future livelihoods.

One key obstacle to this goal has been Cambodia's political tradition of patronage, wherein economic opportunities are dispensed to the politically connected, and a culture of deference to hierarchy and authority makes public criticism of this patronage system less likely. In the natural resource sector, there was increasing evidence in the 1990s that this system was leading to consolidation of land and resource ownership by the wealthy, with the poor increasingly marginalized. Transparency International ranked Cambodia 162 out of

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179 countries in its Corruption Perceptions Index. These conditions make Cambodia one of the most difficult environments for achieving sustainable and equitable development and management of natural resources. Still, opportunities existed alongside the obstacles. After the 1993 election, reforms

to decentralize and de-concentrate political power (by devolving responsibilities to the elected commune councils operating at the local level, a process that has continued to the present) was seen by the international community as an opportunity to empower those who had been excluded from decision-making and denied an adequate share of the resource base.

There was also a need for reform within the national bureaucracy. With government depleted by years of war and turmoil, Cambodia's Ministry of Environment (MoE) had little capacity to develop policy frameworks for environmental management. There was also uncertainty over which branches of government had control over specific environmental issues. It became clear, therefore, that fostering sustainable resource management practices locally would require significant institutional development at higher levels. For example, moving away from legislation by decree (which had been the norm) towards policy-making more informed by research would require building research capacity and fostering a *culture of research* within the MoE. There was also a need to resolve rivalries between the MoE and other ministries, such as the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries, and to define these various ministries' respective roles.

The level of international involvement and interest in ENRM issues in Cambodia has fluctuated as conditions have changed, both in Cambodia and in the policy environments of donor nations. IDRC's presence in Cambodia dates back to late 1992. Its decision "to concentrate on the environmental and social dimensions of sustainable resource management" fed into a 1993 U.N.-backed, multilateral effort to define the structure, mandate, and responsibilities of the new State Secretariat for Environment (precursor of the MoE), and to draw up its work plan. During this early phase, IDRC provided an Environmental Policy Advisor to the

State Secretariat. Having successfully provided technical support and advice to the MoE, in 1995 IDRC moved into a new phase by taking on a leadership role in the Cambodian Environmental Management Program (CEMP), a partnership between IDRC and a consortium of NGOs that received USAID funding. However, when an armed conflict within Cambodia prompted USAID to withdraw its support for CEMP, the program folded—despite having run successfully in its first year. Since that time, the form and aims of IDRC participation in sustainable development initiatives in Cambodia have varied as the policy landscape and challenges within the country have shifted.

## Expectations and capacity development strategies

As noted above, IDRC's goals between 1993 and 1997 were to build organizational capacity within the MoE (for example, by helping to define a policy and legislative framework, including MoE's organizational mandate, structure, and program of work), and to support the wider institutional development of the Environment and Natural Resources Management (ENRM) sector within Cambodia.

But changing conditions necessitated a change in IDRC's direction. In addition to the dissolution of CEMP, internal restructuring (including the closure of the Centre's country program office in Cambodia) led to a retooling of IDRC's strategy. The Centre narrowed its focus by moving away from organization-

wide capacity development processes within the Ministry and towards specific "participatory action research projects" with a wider universe of ENRM actors. Four such research projects are particularly noteworthy:

- Resource Management Policy in Ratanakiri (RMPR), which was intended to secure the rights of ethnic minorities to their land and resources, and to support the decentralization and de-concentration program;
- Participatory Management of Coastal Resources (PMCR), which sought community-derived solutions to overfishing, destructive fishing methods (e.g., the use of dynamite), and the destruction of mangrove forests in Koh Kong province. (Koh Kong has experienced severe environmental pressures as an outgrowth of substantial migration in the post-conflict period);
- The Community Forestry Research Project (CFRP), which engaged two ministries and a university in developing and testing community forestry approaches;
- A fourth project to support federal and provincial offices created to establish community-based fisheries. The government embraced the concept of community fisheries in response to conflicts between large fisheries concessions and communities.

In his report, Veer offers an intensive review of two of the four projects: the coastal resources (PMCR) and community forestry (CFPR) projects. All four projects sprang not just from the importance of addressing sustainable development, but also from the country's need for political reform. In fact, the focus on community-based, participatory projects was made possible by the ongoing process aimed at decentralizing power within Cambodia. Furthermore, in terms of intended results, the involvement of MoE staff in these projects provided a *de facto* training for government officials in methods of sharing power and responsibility for implementation with local communities.



*Community fishery catch*

A third phase of IDRC-supported work with ENRM in Cambodia, which began in 2002 and continues to the present, involves networking and greater collaboration between ENRM advisors, leaders, and members of projects that have previously been supported by the Centre. The aim of this phase of work is to build Cambodians' capacity for further capacity-development in the field of Community-based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM). One ongoing, formal expression of this line of work was the establishment, in 2005, of the CBNRM Learning Institute. Two other

initiatives established in this period were the Rural Livelihoods and Natural Resources Development Research Program that was launched in 2007, and the Cambodia Development Research Forum launched in 2008. These programs are also aimed at scaling up the successes and innovations of past projects, and disseminating and promoting best practices countrywide.

## Major findings

### ***a) Developing Organizational and Institutional Capacity in the Early Years (1992 – 97)***

Assessments by key informants and a formal review conducted in 1995 indicate that IDRC's attempts to build organizational capacity within the MoE were successful. The ministry's information-gathering and analytic skills, as well as policy research capacity, grew during this time. Veer concludes that all three dimensions of capacity development—foundations, competencies, and capabilities—outlined by Peter Morgan (2006) were addressed by IDRC support to the MoE, with particular gains being achieved in the sphere of the more technical, or "hard" capabilities. The collaboration was broad-based, including the deployment of a senior policy adviser, contributions to multi-donor initiatives, and development of a functioning legal and organizational framework. (One indication that the Centre had been effective in encouraging capacity-building within the



ministry was the willingness of other donors to follow IDRC's lead when it moved on to take a leadership role within the new CEMP).

The creation of CEMP came in response to a bigger challenge: Moving beyond the development of organizational capabilities within the ministry, towards the creation of effective frameworks in order to implement sustainable development on the ground. The MoE designated its "best and brightest" employees to work with CEMP. Despite its short duration, the initiative won praise for its design and implementation—particularly its sense of ownership by Cambodian staff, and for the effective assistance provided by external advisers. The former national coordinator referred to CEMP as "most effective in terms of delivery and impact."

***b) Development of Research Capacity:  
Two CBNRM Projects  
(since 1997)***

Veer's report examines two community-based, participatory research projects in detail: the Participatory Management of Coastal Resources Project (operating from 1997 to the present), and the Community Forestry Research Project (operating from 1999 to 2006). It finds that the two projects followed very similar processes for capacity development, and attributes differences in project outcomes more to differences in project design and scale than to a variance in their approaches to capacity building. For example, CFRP was much more complex, being managed by three national organizations and operating in five research areas. By contrast, PMCR had one research

team operating in one area, and was managed only by the MoE. As a result of these different levels of complexity, PMCR (based in one area) was found to have more and "deeper" processes and results relating to research capacity at the community level; while CFRP (with a broader focus) placed greater emphasis on policy development and achieved more in terms of developing facilitation and coaching capabilities.

Both projects used a variety of tools and approaches in seeking to develop capacities. Both were oriented towards "participatory action research," wherein participants were able to "learn from our mistakes." A central part of this process was regular review and analysis—often involving outside advisers, consultants or IDRC program officers—so that lessons could be identified and plans could be adapted for the future. The two projects also made use of a number of "learning events," notably training sessions—some of them general (for example, one was entitled "What is Research?") and others designed for more specific circumstances—as well as study tours. Mentoring was another tool for capacity development. PMCR made greater use of external advisers (who served as mentors) than CFRP. Networks also proved to be useful means of sharing ideas and bringing fresh perspectives into the projects.

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The presence of more external advisors appears to have contributed to a greater strength in analysis and reporting (e.g., writing studies), among the PMCR than the CFPR.

These activities led to a growth in research capacity, for both projects, in two key areas:

- ***the capacity to conceive, generate and sustain research***

The increasing complexity of research in both projects indicates an increased capacity to generate research. Several of the case studies and reports demonstrate team leaders' and team members' increased capacity to promote co-management approaches among other agencies and programs. Degree training abroad was clearly successful in this regard, since project members demonstrated increased abilities to conceive and sustain research after returning from their overseas studies;

- ***the capacity to use research results***

One indication of this capacity is both projects' history of successful contributions to workshops (on topics like coastal management and preparation of forest management plans) organized by international agencies.

However, the record is more mixed in relation to the projects' abilities to influence the formulation of government policy, to a large extent because old ways of arriving at policy decisions have proven resistant to change. A review by R.B. Oberndorf (2005) concludes that, although a lot of legislation dealing with CBNRM had been developed, there were few policy research documents accompanying them. Since research did exist at the time the legislation was drawn up, a likely explanation—one advanced by members of the two project teams—was that the primary force propelling new policies into law remains the personal convictions of the lawmakers. In recognition of this, PMCR built a strategy that centres on personal contact with influential officials. For example, special events have been organized that centre on visits by the Minister of the Environment, senior ministry officials, and others. Despite this approach, there are instances where new legislative initiatives appear to contradict recommendations that arise out of the research. Concerned by this continuing trend, donors have exerted pressure to have new consultative groups formed as an additional means of seeking to expand the influence of research within the policy development process.

### **c) Networking initiatives (2002 to the present)**

While community-based projects could be seen as having a narrower focus than previous efforts in institutional capacity building, this was later offset by a new organizational pluralism that came with the emergence of new strategic partners, notably through the CBNRM Learning Institute (LI). The LI provides a means for using the experience of individual projects to widen the availability, accessibility and application of existing knowledge. One example is its “case study” approach, whereby CBNRM researchers, a number of whom are MoE employees, are led through a process of analysis and reflection on individual cases—similar to the way many MBA programs are conducted. Another example is the publication of a book documenting the state of CBNRM within the country. Twenty-one of thirty-five of the book’s contributing authors reported on IDRC-supported CBNRM initiatives. As noted previously, two other arrangements that have evolved from the community based projects (and which also have a mandate for exchange of knowledge and best practices) are the Natural Resources Development Research Program, and the Cambodia Development Research Forum. In both arrangements, the CBNRM Learning Institute plays a capacity development and coordinating role.

### **Looking Ahead**

An international review conducted by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in 2000 found that donor organizations have been less successful in capacity development in environment than in other types of development assistance and that in many countries, supporting the policy-making capacities of ministries of environment can be a challenging enterprise. The study identifies a “limited capacity to build capacity” as the main challenge in this area. Perhaps partly in response to this critique, developing the “capacity to build capacity” (for instance, through the Learning Institute) has been an increasing focus of IDRC-supported work in Cambodia in recent years. For IDRC to continue work in this area requires the active involvement of new strategic partners such as the Learning Institute and the Cambodia Development Resource Institute. Questions that remain, however, are to what extent those partners would perceive organizational capacity development as a priority within their repertoire of development support strategies, and whether the commitment to ongoing civil service reform is strong enough within government to support this program of work.

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One niche area that provides significant potential to explore further expansion of organizational capacity development is that of management of protected areas—an endeavour of interest to both the MoE and other key donors that are potential partners of IDRC. For example, the World Bank has developed a participatory approach to management planning of protected areas in one specific area, and proposes to expand that approach to four other areas starting in 2008. So far, no staff from CFRP or PMCR have been involved in that initiative. However, it is likely that donors such as the World Bank or UNDP could become interested in contributions from team members from the CFRP or PMCR, or would welcome contributions to

their capacity building efforts (in relation to the management of these protected areas), from the Learning Institute or the Cambodia Development Resource Institute. This represents a new opportunity to insert lessons learned from IDRC-supported research into a new and important context.

## Methodology

This report was prepared by Cor Veer, an independent consultant in rural development and natural resource management based in Bangkok, Thailand. The objective of the report was to analyse whether and how IDRC assistance contributed to the development of organizational and research capacities within Cambodia's Ministry of Environment (MoE). While the initial findings of the report were that such impacts did take place, the report also determined that relationships between MoE and other government agencies and non-governmental organizations were central in Cambodia's efforts to move towards sustainable development. And so, a broader focus—which included consideration of the capacities of organizations and agencies that worked alongside the MoE—was required, with consequent methodological adjustments. Document reviews and interviews with key informants were essential resources for this report. Additionally, a delay in the release of the report allowed for the organization of a feedback session with many of the interviewees and key informants involved.

The report's conceptual framework drew from Anne Bernard's distinction between five categories of research capacity, as well as from Bernard's discussion of participatory action research. The report is also underpinned by Kirk Talbot's idea that "building a research culture" is key to creating a long-term capacity for problem-solving. Peter Morgan's categorization of 'foundational elements,' 'competencies' and 'capabilities' contributing to organizational capacity, were useful in the preparation of this report.